



*Fire and Rescue Division*



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# California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid System

## Orientation

*for the new:*

## Operational Area Coordinator

**ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER**  
Governor

**MATTHEW BETTENHAUSEN**  
Secretary, California Emergency Management Agency

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# NEW OPERATIONAL AREA COORDINATOR ORIENTATION

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## **HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION**

On January 1, 2009, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) merged with the Office of Homeland Security (OHS) under provisions set forth under Assembly Bill 38 and became the California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA); herein throughout the remainder of this document, all current references to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) will now reflect this merger and the new agency, Cal EMA, while historical references will remain as OES.

California communities have historically relied upon mutual aid resources in combating fire and other emergency situations exceeding the capability of a single jurisdiction. Since 1950, the California Master Mutual Aid Agreement and the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan have provided the basis for development of the Statewide Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System.

Every segment of the Fire Service has contributed to the development and refinement of the system. Changes, when made, have been based on service-wide and statewide experience. With continued input and support of the Fire Service throughout the state, the system stands ready to mitigate the effects of human-caused and natural disasters.

The California Emergency Management Agency, Fire and Rescue Division is responsible for the development, implementation, and coordination of the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan. The Plan is developed and updated under the guidance and approval of the Fire and Rescue Services Advisory Committee/FIRESCOPE Board of Directors.

The continued success of California's unique and highly-effective Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System demands a maximum level of understanding and cooperation by all who use and support it. Operational Area Coordinators play an extremely important role in support of the Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid system. This document, and the additional accompanying reference documents, are intended to acquaint you with the responsibilities and objectives of your role as the Operational Area Coordinator.

## FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATION

California's Statewide Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System was developed through the cooperation of every segment of California's fire service. To maintain system integrity, local fire officials are actively involved in day-to-day system management and operation.

California is subdivided into 58 counties. For purposes of the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan, each county is an "Operational Area". (The exceptions are the Lake Tahoe Basin and Los Angeles County, which both actually contain more than one Operational Area, bringing the total statewide to 64). Fire chiefs of each county (Operational Area) elect, from among themselves, an Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinator and an Alternate.

The Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinators are responsible for:

1. Maintaining Fire Defense Resource Inventories.
2. Area Mutual Aid Plan.
3. Dispatch of Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid Resources.
4. Annual Submission of Fire and Rescue Resource Inventories to Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinators.

Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinators, located throughout each of the six Mutual Aid Regions, elect a fire chief from within their respective region to serve as Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator. Operational Area and Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinators have very similar responsibilities. Essentially the size or scope of the area served is the primary difference between the two organizational levels. Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinators are responsible for maintaining regional fire and rescue resource inventories, regional mutual aid plan, and for the coordination of intra-regional mutual aid. They are also responsible for the annual submission of fire and rescue resource inventories to the State Fire and Rescue Coordinator. Again, the job of the Regional Coordinator and the Operational Area Coordinator are very similar.

The State Fire and Rescue Coordinator (the Chief of the Cal EMA Fire and Rescue Division, located in Sacramento) is a member of the California Emergency Management Agency Secretary's staff. The State Fire and Rescue Coordinator is responsible for the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan, coordination of interregional mutual aid, inventory of fire defense and rescue resources within the state, and the acquisition, deployment, and maintenance of Cal EMA-owned fire and rescue apparatus and equipment.

## **Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinator Duties and Responsibilities**

Organizes and acts as chairperson of an Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinating Committee composed of the Alternate Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinators and/or fire chiefs within the Operational Area. The committee may include others as deemed necessary by the chairperson.

In cooperation with its Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinating Committee, the Coordinator will:

1. Organize, staff, and equip area fire and rescue dispatch centers in accordance with the principals enumerated in the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan.
2. Select and submit to the Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator the names of individuals to serve as the alternates at Operational Area fire and rescue dispatch centers.
3. Aid and encourage the development of uniform fire and rescue operational plans within the Area.
4. Aid and encourage the development of countywide fire and rescue communication net operation on the approved fire frequency for the Area. The communication net should tie the communications facilities within the Area to the Operational Area Fire and Rescue Dispatch Center and alternate dispatch centers.
5. Maintain and up-to-date inventory system on fire and rescue apparatus and personnel within the Area for use in dispatching. Compile and forward this information to the respective Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator annually.
6. Develop a dispatching procedure for all state-owned Cal EMA fire apparatus, rescue trucks, and communications vehicles assigned within the Area.
7. Provide fire and rescue coordination to the Cal EMA Operational Area disaster preparedness official.
8. Responsible to aid and assist local, region, and state officials in planning, requesting, and utilizing mobilization centers as needed for staging strike teams and personnel where appropriate.
9. During a "State of War Emergency", shall report to the area Emergency Operations Center to serve on the staff of the Operational Area Disaster Preparedness Director. An authorized representative may serve on this staff in place of the Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinator, if necessary.

## Operational Area Coordinator Orientation

10. During a “State of Emergency” declared by the Governor, or as may be necessary, shall report to the Operational Area Emergency Operations Center or such other location as directed by the Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator. If necessary, an authorized representative may assume this duty.
11. Will be responsible for dispatching all Cal EMA and/or local fire and rescue resources within the Operational Area on major mutual aid operations.
12. If the emergency is within the jurisdiction of the Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinator and overloads the communication facilities, it assigns dispatching of mutual aid equipment to an alternate fire and rescue dispatch center.
13. Shall keep the Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator informed of all operations.
14. Evaluates requests for assistance from local agencies, determines the resources from that Operational Areas which can provide the timeliest assistance, and initiates appropriate response thereof. Determines if the timeliest assistance is from another adjacent Operational Area, and if so, requests assistance from that Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinator not to exceed five engine companies or individual resources, and notifies the Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator of this action. When resources are needed from more than one adjacent Area, either for timely response or when the need is beyond Operational Area capability, the request must be made to the appropriate Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator.
15. Determines approximate time commitment and justification of resources issued to local agency and the length of time it will utilize these resources. Periodically evaluates the justification and commitment to the local agency of these resources, and notify the region.
16. Advises the requesting jurisdiction of the origin of resources responding to the request for assistance.
17. Shall notify and advise the Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator, in a timely manner, of the need to establish mobilization centers and/or staging areas.
18. The Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinator is not responsible for any direct fire or other emergency operations except those which occur within the jurisdiction of his or her own department, agency, etc. The local official in whose jurisdiction the emergency exists shall remain in full charge of all fire and rescue resources, staffing, and equipment furnished for mutual aid operations.

Refer to the flowchart on the following page for a graphical depiction of where the Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinator falls within the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan system.

## Responsibilities of the Operational Area Coordinator

DETERMINE NEEDS

**Local Fire Chief**

Activates Local Fire & Rescue  
Mutual Aid Plan

EVALUATE AREA SITUATION AND RESOURCES

**Operational Area Fire & Rescue  
Coordinator**

Activates Area Fire & Rescue  
Mutual Aid Plan

EVALUATE REGIONAL SITUATION AND RESOURCES

**Regional Fire & Rescue  
Coordinator**

Activates Area Fire & Rescue  
Mutual Aid Plan

EVALUATE STATEWIDE SITUATION AND AVAILABLE RESOURCES

**State Fire & Rescue Coordinator**

Coordinates Inter-Regional Fire & Rescue  
Resources Mobilization



## DEFINITIONS

1. Operational Area – An intermediate level of the State’s fire and rescue services organization, normally consisting of a county and all fire and rescue organizations within the county. (Exception: Los Angeles County and the Tahoe Basin.)
2. Mutual Aid Region – A subdivision of the State’s fire and rescue services organization, established to facilitate the coordination of mutual aid and other emergency operations within a geographical area of the State, consisting of two or more county Operational Areas.
3. Alternates – As noted in “Duties and Responsibilities”, each Operational Area and Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinator will have a first and second Alternate. Alternates selected should be capable of assuming all duties of the position in the event the Operational Area or Regional Fire and Rescue Coordinators are saturated with emergency activity within their own jurisdiction. This, however, does not preclude the delegation of responsibility “in-house” to a qualified subordinate in the absence of the elected Coordinator.

## OTHER REFERENCES

Any organization, by virtue of large numbers of individual units or geographical expanse, must contain a recognized chain of command to operate effectively. Much of the success of any “system” depends upon the capability of the individuals serving at the various levels in the chain of command, and acceptance by their peers. In order to maintain the integrity of the Statewide Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System, the following reference materials must be thoroughly reviewed and understood. The following list of documents is an important part of providing specific information to the new Operational Area Coordinator. Contact your assigned Cal EMA Regional Assistant Chief for additional information.

1. The California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid Plan
2. The California Master Mutual Aid Agreement
3. The California Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System – History and Organization
4. The California Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System – Election Process (Regional and Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinators)
5. Agreement for Local Government Fire Suppression – California Fire Assistance Agreement
6. The California Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System – Assistant Chief

These documents are available on the Cal EMA Fire and Rescue Division web page:

[www.calema.ca.gov/fire](http://www.calema.ca.gov/fire)